Mackinac Island Bike Trail at Sunset
Alyssum Pylar

THE TRUNCATE CAMARADERIE

Caroline Kopp

Prologue

A shadow of the devil faded into the sunlight, which coruscated through the windows of the Berks' family house. The sun outlined its human face, but the metallic grin and evil look in its eyes were far different from human. Its only intention was to kill, nothing more. Its rationality was driven by madness. The mundane creature stood in front of a shaking Mrs. Berks, her hair in disarray and her dress splattered with her husband's fresh blood.

She glanced to the side and saw her husband, the person whom she loved the most. Their devotion was so substantial that, at times, she would catch herself saying she would take her own life for her husband. Now, in the fleeting moment that she actually would, it was unriveting and horrifying.

Her hoarse voice couldn't even let out a crooked gasp as she recognized the murderer. It cackled as if she had no hope and raised its weapon to choose the fate of Mrs. Berks. Her life was spent making choices, only to have the last one be made for her. A bitter end with the last sight of the lifeless face of her husband. A bullseye that pulled the viewpoint immediately to the bullet through his head. A vicious way to view a person upon first glance. Not her husband's beautiful eyes or crooked nose, but the very thing that labels the end of his life.

Just minutes before, the couple were enjoying the fulgent spring day. They were preparing to have the Pillar family come to greet them in their new house they had purchased. After all, it was nearing a year since she and Mr. Berks had gotten married. The two were a perfect match, and couldn't wait to have a family in Baltimore, Maryland. However, that dream now crumpled before her in a wicked way.

The creature raised its weapon, different from the one it used on her husband, and all Mrs. Berks felt was an opening in her throttle. Her thoughts as she felt the warm blood flow down on her clothes was that this truly was an end to her life.

Who knew death would cause so much thought? she pondered.

It was the irony of it all that in her last few moments, she felt a storm of thoughts, but then, in the same seconds, none stayed with her. She felt a tear slip down her crimson cheek, and her last breath slipped through her lips. Then everything went sunless and cold.

Notoriously, three days later, a certain man, John Evans, would find himself in the estate of his unfamiliar childhood friend. Something he never thought he would do after so many years. The need for help would be prominently asked, and nothing seemingly more than that.

Chapter 1

John Evans straightened his back as he sat uncomfortably across a welcoming Ms. Willams. John was familiar with Ms. Williams' house as it was an upper-class cottage. Ms. Willams, or Emily as John used to call her all those years ago, was a teacher at a prestigious all girls academy in downtown Baltimore. For her to have her own maid and estate while being unmarried was incredibly uncommon in society. Her father, however, was the cause of her crucial beginning as a single woman in her mid-twenties living alone. Mr. Williams owned the only bank that was at the heart of the town. He was a prestigious business man and had a desire for his only daughter's happiness. "A hopeless romantic," his wife used to claim to her lady friends over tea. The gossip of the folks in town was that her father gave her the glorious white cottage right outside the main road leading to downtown as a hope to bring in eligible bachelors. To which her mother scowled in horror every time a bachelor came and left that white cottage every so often when she would send the men her daughter's way. However, as John had remembered in their youth, Ms. Williams was only passionate about her independence. Seemingly that brought up a desire to teach education.

How that prospered so well for you, Emily, John thought.

If John was asked openly what he remembered of her all those years ago he would simply shrug. Old friend's past camaraderies merely can't be kindled once the flame went out. However, deeply tucked away inside he would say that the memories of her endured a line of youth with him. Dare he say he loved her at one point, even though he had, but to submit to being so would be unriveting.

They drifted apart when her older brother, Spencer, passed away. To put it simply she started off strong, then slowly her heart became as bitter as the soil that her brother laid to rest in. She pulled herself away from him, his heart left with nothing, and not a word of elucidation. To that he couldn't go back to those moments for they died and so did she to him. Childish it may be but that didn't condone the fact that he was sitting in front of her at this very moment.

The steam of the tea danced; the rectangular shape of sunlight ran through the window behind them. A simple pearl white China tea set with bitter orange tea in it had been brought out by her maid. Awkwardly, in silence, they both ignored the door creaking closed as the maid scurried away, leaving the two to talk over tea. However, John had no intention of drinking tea or even staying long for that matter. That was his plan.

His right palm laid on top of his walking stick, nervously, but he was assured to get what he came for. The suit which he wore only for outings began to feel out of place. Now looking at it he wasn't "dressed to impress." His plain black suit, jacket, top hat, and walking stick were nothing special. Nothing welcoming. If she only had known the sweat that dripped from his head only to be caught by his top hat, would he be in trouble then. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, she spoke.

"Mr. Evans, to what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you again?" Ms. Willams asked after she carefully picked up her cup of tea. She pursed her lips and blew ever so quietly and briefly onto the hot tea.

The question struck John as he sat firmly across from Ms. Willams. She didn't address him as John. What reason would she? He and she were strangers, only familiar to the gossip that spread around town about them. The gossip of John was something that caused a stir in his stomach. What did she know about him or even cared to know?

John couldn't decide if there was even pleasure in seeing her again. It opened old wounds, and he wasn't ready to look back on them. However, what baffled him more was how calm she looked. Her porcelain face with a faint touch of a rosy color on her cheeks and lips put this relaxed feeling inside him when he gazed at her. She wasn't distressed, not one bit. It was like a slap in the face and maybe it was the hint that she had moved on. Forgotten him.

An excerpt from "The Truncate Camaraderie" (a novel in process)

THERE IS A SMALL MOMENT.

Jude Galindo

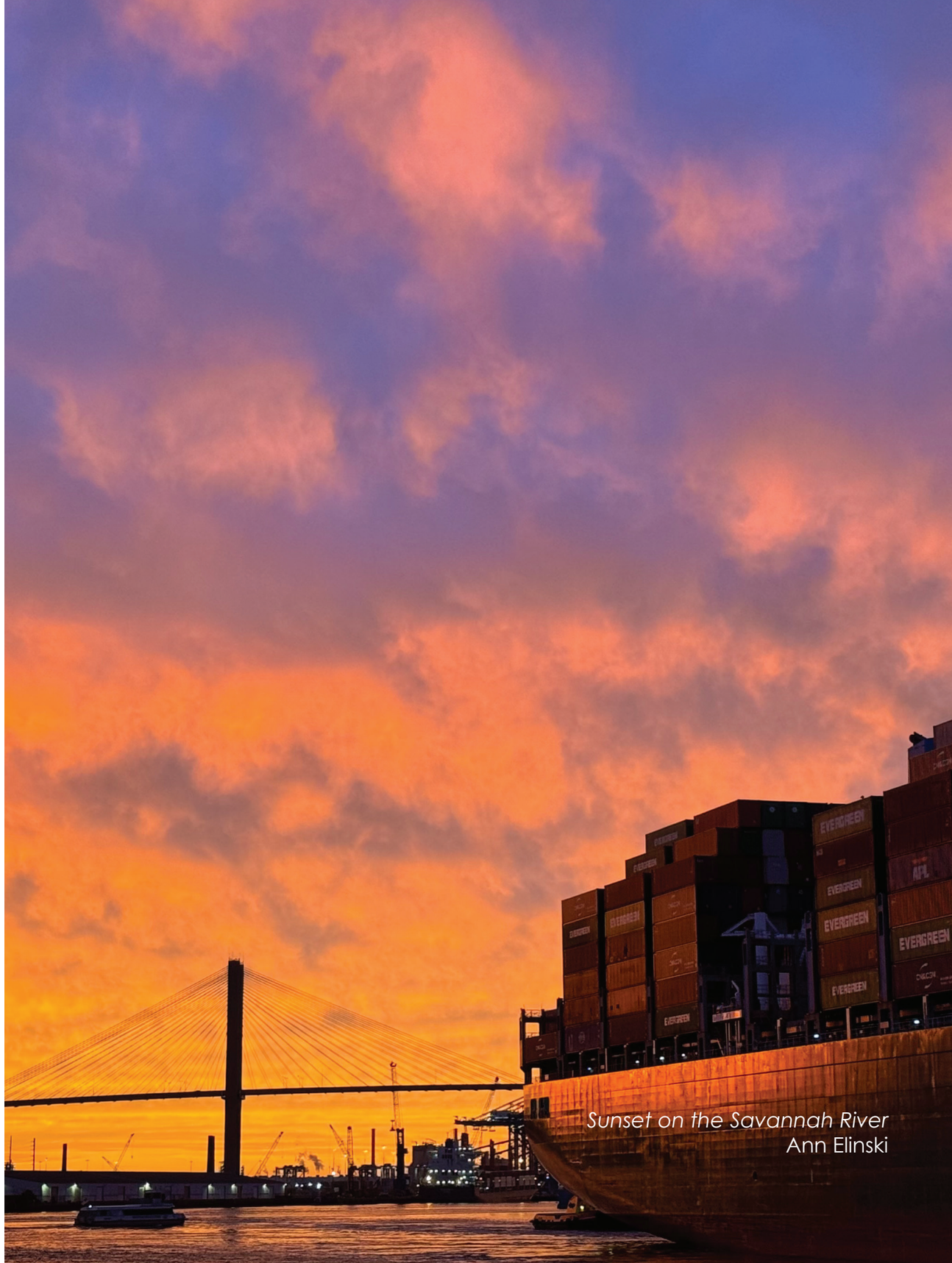
before it begins
just enough for a sigh
or perhaps a gasp
the soft lips on your forehead
the taste of mama's cooking
a little burnt

a candle hisses
not a rattlesnake
but the shush before a deep sleep
the touch of skin over your heart
strokes upon your hair

just enough for a small
rustle of clothes
flip of a page
crunch of leaves underboot
the trumpet calling to finally come home

blink and you'll miss it
don't ignore anything
because when you do
remember

it's the most beautiful thing in the world



Sunset on the Savannah River
Ann Elinski

Dan Boyd

UNTITLED

Rebekah Phillips

Cinderella mailed her left shoe
to the prince's P.O. box and waited
for him to come find her.

She bit her nails until they bled.

Her stepsister went to dinner with
the prince and came home,
faux concern on her face:
I think the prince likes me.
Oh, I don't know.
Isn't Cinders sending him billet doux?

When the FedEx man arrived
she was ashamed to take the box,
her hands were so rough.

Return to sender,
was all it said. *No such number.*
Unable to forward.

ENCLOSURE

Sue-Anne Sweeney

In memory of John K.

Tough, burnished exterior
To cover tender innards
Biting bursts of humor
(Poor slobs, never winners)

Grammatical catastrophes
Camouflage a fertile mind
Schemes for fame and money
Credentials of all kinds

Search for love, fidelity
Yields up disastrous pairings
Through ambition, drive,
His pain is loudly staring

Within lies warmth and care
Few have learned to know
Enclosed in fear and anger,
A gentle, thoughtful soul

SHE WAS BETTY

Karen Marry Sanborn

Tiny, frail, wisps of golden hair,
with aches and pains, tough as nails, she was
with Nancy; an inseparable pair.
Ahead of her time, an education leader, she was
Funny, opinionated, spunky, bold,
with a heart of gold, filled with love to share.
Felician associate, a Madonna event- and Mass-goer, she was
a super bowl party thrower and requester of prayers.
Cherished talks after Mass, Tigers baseball and dinner that night, she was
a co-conspirator for right, and blessed friend so rare.
Proud of those who called her Ciocia, she was
ready with photos or videos to watch, because she cared.
A giver of gifts, of time, and love, she was
a gift to us from God above, now with Him there.
Road trips for the Sisters, for making friends she had a knack, she was
a bad heart and bad back, her crosses to bear.
Betty will be greatly missed, but never far away, she is
with Jesus and in many hearts to stay; neither life nor death is fair.

Wonder
Rachel Goad

Dan Boyd

SPECIAL PLACE

Rebekah Phillips

This special place,
That is so dear,
To some of us,
Each and every year.
I think a lot,
About this place.
I love it but,
I want to chase.
To grow and run,
To leave it be.
To hide and jump,
To set it free.
This place that means,
So much to me.
The time will come,
When it will not be.
It scares me yet,
I must embrace.
That someday soon,
There'll be a new place.
It won't be the same,
I'll be so sad.
Frame this one,
So, I don't go mad.
But my real, true place,
It's not a physical space.
It's in my Father's house,
And the arms of my spouse.

KAIROS

Paul Radzilowski

"Death and conception in mankind is one"
--John Donne

November second, a most propitious day
To be born and live, slipping into time's rill
After a rushing tensely to hospital
In the first instance, or in the very last
Though torrents of rain flow down from the heavens
Thus washing away all unstowed human things,
While updrafts in clouds raise windy fists
From beneath the dark jackets of thunderheads,
But still, even so, the clock ticks on unhurried
And the winds they spawn tear the clouds apart,
Leaving an even glow at evening time,
Like a pale bright blanket over a baby,
Calm and even, like the light in dreams.

July 28-30th, 2023

Dan Boyd